

Letter from Taizé

June - July 2000 Bimonthly 3.50 FF 3



PROCESSED

JUN 08 2000

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YOUNG ADULT
EUROPEAN
MEETING
28 December - 1 January
Taizé
2000/2001
Barcelona

EASTER AT TAIZÉ

Humble trusting which fills life with beauty

“Awake, o
sleeper, arise

from among the dead and Christ shall be your light!”. This call rang out in the complete silence of the Church of the Reconciliation at the beginning of the Easter morning celebration. And the response was taken up by the six thousand young people present who filled not only the church building and all its extensions, but also two large marquees alongside. Light too passed from hand to hand and filled the church as each person lit the small candles held by their neighbours. During the Easter morning service a young brother from Britain made his lifelong commitment in the community.

In the days leading up to Easter, the Holy Week liturgy prepared our hearts to welcome the joy of the paschal mystery. And on Saturday evening, speaking of the lifelong commitment in the community, Brother Roger said:

“The call of the vocation comes from the Holy Spirit. But how can one persevere in such a vocation one’s whole life long? The Holy Spirit is always present. If we discover ourselves to be weak, strength is given in God. If within us there are hesitations and doubts, the Holy Spirit rekindles our trust. Sometimes, it is as if Christ were saying to us: I am familiar with your difficulties and your poverty, yet you are filled. What is

it that fills you? It is God’s wellsprings which lie hidden deep within you. These living springs are in you. God never withdraws his communion. And to our surprise we discover this: it is not the possession of exceptional gifts which makes it possible to respond to a vocation, but first and foremost a humble trusting, that Gospel reality which fills life with beauty.”

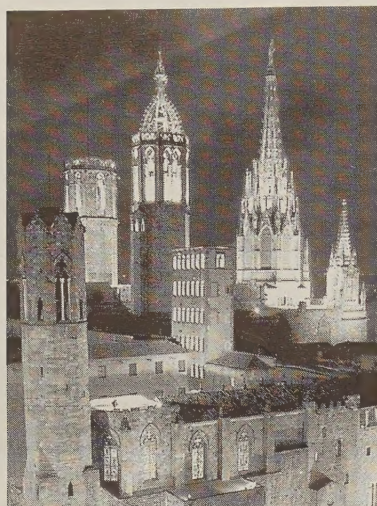
In April and May, more than fifteen thousand young adults participated in the international meetings at Taizé. Some of them had made long journeys: from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, the Baltic States, Portugal, Scandinavia and Albania. This year drawing on the expertise

and experience of visitors, brothers of the community are leading a wide range of workshop groups.

Young adults from all the different continents, who are staying at Taizé for an extended period, find the space during the “Forum” meeting to communicate something of the richness of their culture and their enthusiasm in faith.

As you arrive at Taizé, you now see a big map of the world (see page 7). It shows how this year meetings of the “pilgrimage of trust” are being held on all the continents. At present, the meeting in Queretaro (Mexico), 18-21 May, for which people gathered from all over the country, is the centre of attention.

in Barcelona



From 28th December 2000 to 1st January 2001, tens of thousands of young adults from Europe and the whole world will be welcomed in the city of Barcelona. This next stage in the "Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth" will be the 23rd European Meeting of Young Adults organised by the Taizé Community.

Everyone has seen pictures of the tourist sites of the city of Barcelona, but not so many have had the chance to meet its inhabitants, to discover the life of the churches of the old neighbourhoods or of the towns round about, scattered among the hills or along the coast. Who would suspect the existence of lively networks of solidarity and mutual help in the old sectors that are so characteristic of the city? In the face of the very rapid changes the city is undergoing, it is exciting to see how Christians and others are responding to the challenges where a society based on leisure exists side by side with both a deeply rooted Christian culture, and the problems of poverty and exclusion characteristic of a great western metropolis.

Barcelona has twice before offered hospitality to young adults coming from all over Europe, but then the European Meetings brought together smaller numbers of participants than they do today. For years, many people have been waiting to be able to live through another such experience, this time with young people coming from every part of Europe. In this agglomeration which is home to three million inhabitants, they are not afraid of welcoming a larger number of people. Some people even see this as an opportunity which will stimulate them to reinforce their cooperation and understanding:

"We have a huge number of groups, which often have a very specific aim; we call them 'collectives'. These groups are very committed, but often each one keeps to itself, even if they have similar aims. Working together for a while with a common goal, welcoming tens of thousands of young people, will help us to

rely on each other, to get to know each other, and to search for unity."

"Our local church has a great tradition of openness", the animator of one parish said to us. "Because of our geographical position, we have always been orientated towards Europe and the world. This openness and ability to approach others are still very strong among us. Every summer, hundreds of young people go to help with humanitarian projects, sometimes very far away. On the other hand, it is more difficult to suggest commitments at home, because there are so many possibilities on offer; perhaps with some people there is also a fear of long-term commitment; or again people can have the impression that they are being asked to give a lot themselves while receiving little in return. The meeting will help young people to see that faith is alive among other young people too, and that there are new possibilities of praying and different ways of living in communion with God and with others. In fact, we may have a lot of activities for young people, outings for children, summer camps and so on, but it is not easy to make the transition towards a deeper faith."

The European Meeting will be organised around common prayers which will be held every midday and evening in large halls at the centre of the city. In the afternoons, there will be a choice of different workshops. In the mornings, after the prayer in the parishes, there will be time for sharing in small groups together with people who have taken on commitments locally, such as members of Caritas. "In our city", said one of the leaders of this organisation, "we are fortunate to see many people committing themselves to expressing solidarity in down-to-earth ways. Projects are springing up everywhere to help children, immigrants, or homeless people. We try to help them to get in touch with others and to train themselves. And we try to help people to reflect more fundamentally and we support educational work about the causes of exclusion. It will be easy to find witnesses with something to share during this European Meeting."

MEETINGS AT TAIZÉ 2000

The Letter "Astonished by Joy (Letter 2000)" suggests to each of us to live out the call of the Gospel in the following way: "The year 2000 is a time marked out for realising forgiveness and reconciliation in concrete ways, not only among Christians, but in the different situations round about us, with non-believers too."

During the weekly meetings at Taizé, the thrice-daily prayer when all gather together, both the brothers of the community and the young adult visitors, is central. Meetings for reflection and exchange of ideas are however also essential in order for us to be stimulated to think about what we can do.

The community does not seek to create any youth movement. When people return home after a stay at Taizé, it is not with any programme or method that they go, but somewhat more aware of the inner life that they carry, and with a greater attention for those who are entrusted to them.

Seeking with young people from all countries how to engender hope across the world

Biblical reflection

Brothers of the community give daily introductions based on Bible passages. Our aim in this is to give help in finding a personal communion with God and how to live from the Holy Spirit in the midst of daily life. Rather than seeking a sheltered life, unexposed to the difficulties of the world, we want to live out Gospel values in society so as to be the "salt of the earth". Meeting young people from other continents at Taizé brings the difficulties and suffering of the world closer, but it also stimulates us to hope. We are not alone – we are linked, wherever we live, in a communion.

Those who choose to spend the week deepening their knowledge of the Bible follow meetings on one of these two themes (depending on the week and language-group):

"What does the First Letter of St. Peter say to us in 2000?" (What hope did the first Christians have? What involvement did they have in society, although they were a small minority group?)

"The Ten Commandments – a space of freedom", or: "Rediscovering the Ten Commandments" (Instead of confining us in a moralising law, this ancient text can open paths to a true covenant with God and a life of communion with other people.)

The Bible Study group meets each morning with one of the brothers, then there is time to reread the Bible passages and for personal reflection. Later, there are small-group meetings in order to share the discoveries and experiences of others.

Those who choose other groups for their week at Taizé, be it general discussion or the "working group" which helps with practical tasks, have meetings with the following theme: "Following Christ – how does the Gospel open a way forward beyond all our hopes?" Daily Bible passages underpin the meetings and lead us to accompany Peter the Apostle on his journey from the Sea of Galilee, to Jerusalem and on to Rome. How does Christ call us to follow him today? Can the story of our own life become a kind of gospel?

15-16 year olds

During the summer and main holiday periods, there is a special programme for 15 and 16 year olds. Introductions and small discussion groups alternate with

meetings with young adults from a wide variety of countries. Young people coming to Taizé to participate in this group need to be accompanied by adult leaders.

Silent retreat

It is possible to come to Taizé for a silent retreat. Those who are intending to do this meet, on their arrival, with one of the brothers or sisters to consider how to spend the week. Accommodation is apart. Except from the communion is apart. Except from the communion is apart.

The new workshops

Several times a week, workshop groups are held on a wide variety of subjects, some involving art and music, or video presentations. Brothers of the community lead these groups with the help of participants in the meeting who have an expertise or particular life experience to share. The workshops which were held during Holy Week are listed below. These and others will also be held during the weeks of summer meetings:

- The icon: a window upon the mystery of God
- Using songs from Taizé for praying with others when we return home
- Deepening our way of looking and listening
- Eyes with which to see in another way: a time with works of art, old and new
- Discovering J.S. Bach: introduction and listening to a cantata
- Young people play classical music

- Living from the Gospel
- How can I discern God's call for me? reflection with one of the brothers
- In the face of suffering (illness, death, family break-ups) how does the Gospel help us?
- Entering into the life of the Risen Christ: understanding baptism
- Opening our eyes upon the world
- Building peace in the world: discussion with a specialist in international relations
- Discovering a faraway country (Young people tell their stories)
- The hope and suffering of children from shanty towns and favelas (those involved in such situations tell of their involvement)
- Healing the wounds of the past between peoples: reflection with a historian

- Faith and Society
- What can we do about the violence which affects the milieu of many young people?
- Approaches to the economy: what can be done to support justice and development?
- Professional life and the Gospel: a few people explain their commitment in their profession
- The Internet: how can we best use this tool?
- Making the city a place fit to live in: experiences with the very poor in urban society
- A multicultural society: opportunities and challenges
- Biblical themes
- The Resurrection: loving Christ without having seen him
- Beginning to read the Bible
- Video "The Resurrection", followed by discussion
- Questions of faith: dialogue with one of the brothers

Why did Jesus begin his teaching with the Beatitudes (Matt 5, 1-12)?

The Gospel according to Saint Matthew is made up of discourses by Jesus that alternate with narrative sections. In his first great discourse, often called "the sermon on the mount," Jesus reveals to us the heart of his message. The scene can be compared with one that took place on another mountain, Mount Sinai, where God assured the Israelites that he would always be there for them. The sign of his presence was the Law, summed up in the "ten commandments" (Exodus 20, 1-17). By following the commandments, God's people "walked in the Lord's footsteps" and became a reflection of God's presence on this earth.

Jesus, for his part, announces that God is becoming present in a new and definitive fashion; his presence is both more interior and more universal. "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt 4, 17; cf. 12, 28). And instead of the ten commandments, he proclaims the Beatitudes: "Happy..." In the Scriptures, this formula is used to express that a person or group of people is well placed to benefit from God's favour; they are where God wants them to be. "Happy the person who does not walk in the way of the wicked..." but who delights in the Law of the Lord" (Psalm 1, 1-2). "Happy the person who trusts in the Lord" (Jeremiah 17, 7). Human activity is considered here not so much from the viewpoint of its source in a human being but of its finality. It is the occasion for God to bestow his grace, to become present.

The Beatitudes of Jesus emphasize the fact that his message is truly "good news." Before being a rule that human beings have to follow, they are the proclamation that God has entered into the human condition in a brand-new way. And the Beatitudes indicate the place where God becomes present. In this respect they do not refer to nine different groups, but rather indicate nine approaches to the same mystery of a God who comes close to us. And the astonishing thing is that God does not become accessible where we would expect it. We do not find God starting from our "strong points"—our talents, our strength, our more or less impressive accomplishments. The Beatitudes show us a God who enters the world through our "lacks," through our poverty. Though it would be possible to transform some of the Beatitudes into ethical maxims ("be merciful, be a peacemaker..."), others resist this process with all their strength. Should we force ourselves to mourn, to be poor, to be persecuted? There is a paradox here that we should not attempt to do away with. God's logic cannot be purely and simply identified with the self-realization of a human being, even the most enlightened human being.

In the final analysis, what gives consistency to this text is the figure of Jesus himself. Before being a way of speaking about his disciples, the Beatitudes are the self-portrait of the One in whom God has become fully present at the heart of our world. If they unsettle us, that is because Jesus as well never ceases to astonish us. Who would ever have imagined a God who comes to us in such an apparently ordinary way?

The first Beatitude, which is a kind of summing up of the message of the whole passage, says, "Happy the poor in spirit" (Matt 5, 3). Or, as Saint Luke puts it: "Happy you the poor" (Luke 6, 20). Are we required to give up our struggle against want and misery and for a just sharing of the goods of the earth? Must the disciples of Jesus reject material possessions?

First of all, we must realize that, unlike so many other spiritual paths of the past and present, the Bible has nothing against material realities. On its very first page, we read: "God saw all he had made: it was very good" (Gen 1, 31). The Creator of material as well as spiritual realities, God places everything at the disposal of human beings. To use and to benefit from God's gifts is an integral part of life on earth; visible and tangible realities are among the blessings by which God wants to ensure his creatures a fullness of life.

At the same time, the Bible portrays another great truth: God is on the side of those who have no one else to turn to but him. We see this quite clearly in the story of the Exodus. There, the Lord listens to the cry of women and men condemned to slavery and liberates them, making them his own people. In this way God shows himself to be their Saviour, their Redeemer, the One who gives life to those who have nothing.

As they reflected on this fundamental truth in the course of the centuries, God's people came to realize that the essential attitude before a God who is the Giver of gifts is to come to him with empty hands. When he speaks of "poverty in spirit," Jesus is referring to this attitude. The poor of the Gospel are men and women who know that they need God and others, the opposite of people locked into an attitude of arrogant self-sufficiency. If they have empty hands, it is so God can fill them with good things. And since they trust in the generosity of their heavenly Father, they are not threatened by the spirit of possessiveness. They can give to others what God has given them, confident that they will receive what they need each day anew (cf. Matt 6, 11.25-34). Sharing thus becomes their rule of life (cf. Acts 4, 32).

Gospel poverty is close to a childlike spirit. If Jesus often showed a special love to little children, even proposing them as models to imitate (Matt 18, 1-4), that is not because children are better than adults. Anyone who takes care of children knows they can be very difficult at times. But they know by instinct something that grownups can forget: they are absolutely sure that they cannot keep going by themselves. Children need to trust in order to survive. Similarly, the poor of the Gospel know that by themselves they are nothing; they have to count on God and their brothers and sisters for everything. The "lack" the empty place within them to which they consent, becomes the site where God can make his dwelling, an openness to communion. Once again, Jesus is the one who illustrates this Beatitude best by his own life: "The Son can do nothing by himself... The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything into his hands" (John 5, 19; 3, 35). Living solely by trust in his Abba, his loving Father, Jesus is stripped to the essentials so that in his simplicity God can shine through perfectly, "so that you can become rich through his poverty" (2 Cor 8, 9).

Is poverty a Gospel value?

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

2 SUN Be generous, for you know the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor for your sake.
Jn 20:24-29

3 Mon St THOMAS Risen from the dead, Jesus said to Thomas who doubted, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
Is 2:2-5

4 Tue Isaiah said: The peoples of the earth will say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord so that he may teach us his ways."
Lk 10:25-37

5 Wed Having told the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked, "Who showed themselves to be a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" They answered him, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

6 Thu Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which someone took and sowed in their field. Of all seeds it is the smallest, yet once it has grown it is the biggest of plants.
Mt 13:31-32

7 Fri Bear each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.
Ga 6:1-10

8 Sat Jesus told someone: You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.
Lk 18:18-23

9 SUN Paul writes: God said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.
2 Co 12:1-10

10 Mon Mary said: My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
Lk 1:46-55

11 Tue God said to Ezekiel: Son of man, listen carefully to all my words and take them to heart, then go to your compatriots and speak to them.
Ezk 3:10-11

12 Wed James writes: Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.
Jm 1:17-27

13 Thu While two disciples were on their way to Emmaus, talking together about all that had happened, Jesus himself came up and walked with them.
Lk 24:13-35

14 Fri Jesus said: Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.
Lk 14:27-33

15 Sat Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me.
Jn 14:1-3

16 SUN Calling the twelve to him, Jesus sent them out two by two. And they went preaching the need to change one's heart, and they drove out many evil spirits.
Mk 6:7-13

17 Mon Moses told the people: God set his heart on you and chose you, not because you are more numerous than other peoples, but it was out of love for you that the Lord delivered you from the land of slavery.
Dt 7:7-8

18 Tue Paul writes: From now on those who buy something should live as if they did not possess and those who use the things of the world should do so without being engrossed in them. Because this world as we know it is passing away.
1 Co 7:29-31

19 Wed Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.
Lk 19:1-10

20 Thu May there be no divisions among you. Be closely united in mind and thought.
1 Co 1:10-13

21 Fri God wanted all his fullness to dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things to himself.
Col 1:15-20

22 Sat Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a trader looking for precious pearls, who on finding one of great value, goes, sells everything he has and buys it.
Mt 13:44-46

23 SUN When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them at length.
Mk 6:30-34

24 Mon John wrote to the first Christians: Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Thus you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.
1 Jn 2:24-28

25 Tue St JAMES Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the forgiveness of many.
Mt 20:24-28

26 Wed Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.
Rm 12:14-21

27 Thu Without wavering, let us hold fast to the hope we have, for the one who has promised is faithful. And let us seek to stimulate one another in love and goodness.
Heb 10:19-25

28 Fri Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted because of my name. But make up your mind not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I shall give you words and wisdom.
Lk 21:5-19

29 Sat The Word became flesh and lived among us. From God's fullness we have all received.
Jn 1:9-18

30 SUN After the people saw Jesus feed the crowd, they began to say: "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone.
Jn 6:1-15

31 Mon The Lord says to his people: Look and see the joy that is coming to you from God.
Ba 4:36-37

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6 SUN TRANSFIGURATION

Mk 9:2-10

Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

7 Mon

Ph 2:1-11

Taking the nature of a servant, Christ became as human beings are. And he humbled himself still further, remaining faithful to the point of death, and death on a cross. Therefore God has exalted him, and has given him the name that is above all other names.

8 Tue

Pr 4:18-27

The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, whose brightness increases to the full light of day.

9 Wed

Lk 17:3-4

Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him.

10 Thu

Mt 10:38-39

Jesus said: Any one who gives their life for my sake will find it.

11 Fri

Ezk 36:24-27

The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

12 Sat

Lk 6:46-49

Jesus said: Whoever comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them is like someone building a house who digs down deep and lays the foundations on rock.

13 SUN

Jn 6:47-51

Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

14 Mon

Ps 1

The person who finds their joy in God's law is like a tree planted by the water, which bears its fruit in season and whose leaves never wither.

15 Tue

Lk 1:39-56

THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: The Lord has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty-handed.

16 Wed

Rm 12:9-13

Paul writes: May your love be sincere, clinging to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection.

17 Thu

Mt 10:13-16

Jesus said: Let the little children come to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

18 Fri

Lm 3:22-26

God's compassion is renewed every morning; his faithfulness is great. It is good to await in silence the salvation of the Lord.

19 Sat

Ga 2:19-20

Paul writes: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

20 SUN

Jn 6:51-58

Jesus said: Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

21 Mon

Mt 13:44-46

Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.

22 Tue

1 K 8:22-40

Solomon prayed: Listen, Lord, forgive and act, deal with every person according to all they do, since you know their heart — you alone know the heart of everyone.

23 Wed

1 Jn 4:18-21

This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother and sister.

24 Thu

Ep 3:7-12

Paul writes: Through our faith in Christ Jesus, we can approach God with complete confidence.

25 Fri

Lk 5:27-32

Jesus noticed a tax collector called Matthew sitting at the tax office and he said to him, "Follow me." And, leaving everything, Matthew got up and followed him.

26 Sat

Mt 4:12-17

Jesus said: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

27 SUN

Jn 6:57-63

Jesus said: The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

28 Mon

Ac 17:22-28

In God we live and move and have our being.

29 Tue

Zc 8:16-19

The Lord says to his people: Within your gates render judgments that are true and make for peace. Yes, love truth and peace.

30 Wed

1 Co 15:54-58

Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.

31 Thu

Dt 30:15-20

Choose life: loving the Lord your God, listening to the Lord's voice, holding fast to him — for in this your life consists.

Invited by his friend "Simon the leper" shortly before his Passion, Jesus is in Bethany, a village facing Jerusalem. During the meal, a woman comes up to him with a precious ointment and pours it on his head. This waste disturbs the guests. The ointment cost 300 denarii, a good yearly salary for a worker. That amount of money could have helped many poor people.

Jesus does not agree with those who criticize that woman. And yet nobody can doubt his concern for the poor: "Sell your possessions," he says to those who want to follow him, "and give the money to the poor" (Luke 12:33). And here too, he says that sharing with the poor will always be necessary. But he wants people to understand that even the most serious moral commitment is in danger of losing its meaning if efficiency becomes the sole criterion. Jesus approves the fact that the woman forgot to calculate and that she was motivated by her love alone. She certainly went beyond what was reasonable, and yet she was right in pouring the perfume on Jesus. Made attentive by her love for him, the Christ, she was the first to honour his crucified body.

Jesus admires the woman's act. He says that in her memory, what she did will be told in the whole world! She has done "a good work," and this could also be translated "a beautiful work." The beauty of this deeply human act reflects the beauty of God's love. God pours out his love for us like this perfume, without calculating or measuring, without conditions. On the eve of his Passion, Christ could recognize himself in this "wasted" ointment. He did not try to save his life; he gave it. "He loved us and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:2).

- Would I have seen the woman's act as Simon's guests did, as Jesus did?
- What helps us to recognize not only the goodness, but also the beauty of God and Christ?
- What can lead us to open our hearts to God and to the poor around us?

Peter addresses those "who delight in life." He agrees with the Biblical tradition which affirms that the goal of the commandments is to make us happy (see Deuteronomy 5:16,29,33 etc.). Here he gives concrete indications to seek peace, for where there is peace, life is good. Peace is fragile; it cannot be imposed. It is timid; little is required for it to flee. That is why we have to "pursue it." We need to be very attentive in order to keep walking in its steps.

First of all, we have to seek the spirit of unity. This does not necessarily mean to have the same opinions about everything. Unanimity is something deeper. It means trusting that the Holy Spirit is doing the same work in others as in me, even if at times I can only believe this and not realize it concretely. Mutual love is expressed through compassion and sympathy. Those who rejoice at the happiness of others and who know how to suffer with those in trouble (Romans 12:15) become one heart and one soul.

The spirit of humility consists in seeing in each person someone worthy of being served.

Seeking peace means not "repaying one wrong with another, one insult with another." Christians are called to put an end to the spiral of evil that transmits wounds and humiliations from one person to another, or sometimes from one generation to another. Forgiveness is the opposite of passivity. It is a form of resistance to evil, a combat to stop the spread of deadly contagion. "Bless in order to inherit a blessing" also means, for love of life, to bandage wounds instead of opening them.

- What is necessary to make the places where we live places where life is good?
- How can we keep on loving when we are wounded by harshness?
- How can we break the cycle of humiliation by being "the last link in the chain"? How can we remove the poison and the harm from hurtful words and actions?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.



South Africa

African values: solidarity, compassion, equality

Last autumn, Little Sister Iris Mary, who had just finished a twelve-year term as the general superior of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of Jesus, spent a few weeks in Taizé. During an informal conversation, she communicated something of her experience and her confidence in Africa.

I was born in South Africa. I come from a group that is called "coloured". It means of mixed race. But that doesn't mean my father was African and my mother European. The people in Cape Town, our community, had intermarried for many years, for two hundred years or three hundred years. So I am of a marriage of people who had intermarried already, over generations long before. The mixed-race community is a mixture of many things, not just Europeans and Africans. There are people who come from India, there were slaves who came from Malaysia. The community of coloured people, which is very strong in the Cape, has a mixed culture. It's a culture with an African background and a Malay one, and an Indian one.

In that society that is mixed racially, there was always the desire to be like the oppressor. To imitate him as much as you can. To become like him. Because for you, he's the one who has all the power. Well, you hate him, and you hate his language; people didn't want to learn Afrikaans because of that. But in fact, all you really want is to be like him, to have what he has. And it takes a lot of distance, a lot of belief in yourself to be happy with what you are. Also because what you are is looked down upon by the oppressor. That's why you are poor. The problem with racism is that it's based on something that you can't change: it's ethnic. If you tell me I'm "bad" because I steal or I rob, that is something you can change. If you tell me I'm "bad" because of my colour, there's nothing I can do about it. So all my life I will think that all that comes from me and my skin colour is wrong. Unless I have the distance that tells me that it's also beautiful. I had never thought of myself as being coloured until I came to Europe for the first time.

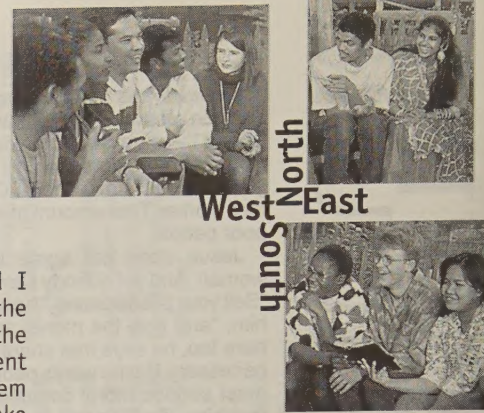
Whenever a catastrophe happens, the poor are always the first that are hit. Whether it's a war, or famine, or an earthquake. It's sure that there is a lot of suffering, and a lot of moral suffering too, because the standard of living is low. But within all that, you also find the great richness of people. People who resist. The word resilience often comes to mind, because such people have been through so much, and they are the ones who will go on, they won't give up. I find extraordinary resilience in women.

If I look back at South Africa, and I think of all those instances where the men were sent to prison, I see it was the women who earned their living and sent their children to school, who got them an education. The women had to take over, and to support their husbands who were in prison at the same time. And even now, in a poor area, no matter what happens, the women always stand up to do something about it. It happens all the time.

Life continues and people just go on. When I was in Goma in the Congo last year, the refugees from Rwanda were going there, especially the ethnic Hutus. When I got there they had already been chased from there to another place, and a lot of them had been killed. One of the sisters took me to see the site of the camp, and it was all full of pieces of plastic which still had the UN logo on them. And there were also rows of flowers that women had planted. The women had actually planted flowers all around the area! They had planted vegetables as well, but the soldiers had taken the vegetables. But the flowers were still there. And for me that was the sign of the resilience of people in those terrible situations. I know one family in particular who had gone through all these things, and then came back to stay in the Congo, and again they grew vegetables in order to be able to sell something and to have something to eat. The soldiers came again and took all their vegetables and all their belongings. And they came and asked for seeds to plant again!

I think that people basically believe in life. Among poor people especially, they don't think that anything is due to them, and so they begin again. If you thought that something was due to you, you would say: "Why did God do that to me?" Or you would say: "It's the fault of so-and-so." But if you've always had to struggle, you begin again. Especially people with children, they believe in their children so they continue.

In Africa there is a lot of sanity! People are sane. Africans on the whole are very healthy people, bodily and morally. Even physically, Africans are very strong, except of course those people who have been hit by famine and war and disease. Africans are beautiful physically! And very healthy in mind. The traditions in Africa have very sane origins. When you see Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years, he can come out as the icon of his people. He doesn't come out broken, bowing his head, and he is the master of



reconciliation. People are healthy mentally, and that is part of the tradition and the culture of Africa. Perhaps things are changing now to a certain extent, because cities are changing people. People used to live only with this sort of economy: they had one cow or two and they planted things, and they bartered. But that was taken away by multinational companies who said: "No, now you're only going to grow coffee," or: "You're only going to work on the mines."

It's going to take time to build a new society in South Africa. All we can do in the meantime is to live authentically, to believe authentically. Not to want too much power, to share things. Most of the time it doesn't come naturally, and yet a lot of people are capable of it! It is in the values of African people, this solidarity, compassion and equality.

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